

Influence of Land Impermanence Syndrome on Conservation and Utilization of Agrobiodiversity and Subsequent Effect on Food Attitudes and Consumption Patterns

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Key Takeaways

- As the population increases, average household land holdings decrease.
- There is a need to mitigate land fragmentation and help communities utilize their land in a more efficient and effective way.
- In the absence of adequate support, tenure insecurity continues to affect land use.
- Household dietary diversity can be improved primarily through supporting households to improve on-farm crop diversity even with short-term crops, conserving areas that are a source of wild foods, and promoting diversified livelihood strategies to improve household food security.
- To support the communities and institutions, engagement and harmonization among different stakeholders, as well as dissemination and integration of traditional knowledge with new technologies and innovations are crucial.
- Consider the customary tenure system equivalent to other tenure systems as it comprises the largest percentage of land nationwide. Apply the law accordingly in practice as well as in theory.

Objectives

The overall project objective was to investigate the drivers behind perceptions of land tenure stability/instability (permanency/impermanency) in rural northern Uganda and the influence these perceptions have on decision-making processes related to the utilization and conservation of agrobiodiversity and ultimately, household-level food choices. The study also looked to discern how the region's agrobiodiversity has evolved over time. Specifically, the study examined how food production and consumption has changed as agrobiodiversity has changed and approaches for sustainable agrobiodiversity conservation that may lead to healthier food choices.

Background

In the sub regions of Acholi and Teso in rural northern

Uganda, upwards of 76% of land is held under customary ownership, lacking formal written documentation. As a result of this and lax enforcement of governmental land policies, smallholder access and rights to land can be precarious. Smallholder livelihoods are threatened by land tenure insecurity in these areas, which has been compounded by recent conflicts, land seizures, and displacement. Land insecurity has unknown implications for food and nutrition security, particularly among vulnerable populations including women and young children. In particular, smallholders' perceptions of their land insecurity may result in "land impermanence syndrome," wherein land holders respond to insecurity by rejecting investments in longer-term agriculture development and conservation strategies (including strategies to promote and leverage agrobiodiversity).

This results in persistent underdevelopment, poverty, food insecurity, chronic malnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies. The relationships between land impermanence syndrome, agrobiodiversity, food production, and food consumption have been largely overlooked as drivers of food choice. This study contributed evidence to develop targeted nutrition and agricultural policies and programs that are relevant to the specific needs of the Acholi and Teso people by addressing the negative effects of land tenure impermanency, promoting agrobiodiversity and influencing healthier dietary choices.

Methods

This mixed-methods study took place among smallholder farming households in the post-conflict areas of Acholi and Teso subregions in northern Uganda. Household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews were conducted to elicit participant perspectives on the relationships between changes in land impermanence, agrobiodiversity, land use, and household food and nutrition security over two decades (1997-2017). The project sought in-depth evidence regarding the influence of these environmental and political economic changes on the food and nutrition security of women of reproductive age and children under five.

Results

From 1997 to 2017, family land size holdings reduced by 50% (from a mean of twelve acres to a mean of six acres). Land tenure insecurity was significantly influenced by household income, household size, and family/customary land. Half of both land tenure-secure and land tenure-insecure households in this study faced anxiety or uncertainty regarding food supplies. Over half (52%) consumed nutritionally deficient diets. Nearly two-thirds (>60%) of respondents reported that land tenure insecurity negatively affected land use activities.

The results also revealed a high prevalence of food insecurity among women of reproductive age (WRA, 15-49 years), with the situation significantly higher in Teso (76%) compared to Acholi (61%). For both sub regions, prevalence of food insecurity was higher among the land insecure (72%) compared to the land secure households (67%). The dietary diversity among WRA at both sites was generally low to medium. The results further revealed that only 43% of WRA in Acholi met the minimum dietary diversity requirement, based on FAO guidelines, compared to 65% in Teso. Dietary diversity of WRAs/mothers was significantly enhanced by age of household head, access to more species and respondent's location. Family dependency ratio, time to the markets, and land tenure insecurity negatively influenced the dietary diversity of mothers.

More Information

- **Policy Brief** - https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/107414/Diversifying_Ekesa_2020.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- **Project Page** - <https://driversoffoodchoice.org/research/project-descriptions/influence-of-land-impermanence/>

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